

# “UNMAPPING” THE URAL PLAYSCAPES: AN ANALYSIS OF PLAYGROUNDS AND CHILD PLAY UNDER THE POST-SOVIET URBAN TRANSITION OF YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA

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This study examines playgrounds as lenses on urban transitions to explain the link between urban transformations and changes in the discourse of play and childhood. Specifically, it compares Soviet public playgrounds and post-Soviet privatized playscapes in the city of Yekaterinburg, Russia, through primary observation and secondary data analysis. Using the framework of social reproduction developed by Cindy Katz and Saskia Sassen to explain how the local forces affect cities, my analysis shows that the shift in the discourse of play and childhood in the post-Soviet period is hinged on global influences combined with local transformations, from the abandonment of Soviet ideals of communal play spaces to the embracement of today's consumerist play places. Whereas the old Soviet playgrounds have uncertain purposes, in contemporary Yekaterinburg private playgrounds offer a narrative of play in terms of leisure, love, and convenience for parents. Children turn into consumers of private play, leaving most of the Soviet playgrounds as idle spaces in the city. This article argues that Yekaterinburg's shift toward participating in the globalized economy combined with its transition from the Soviet ideals maintains social relations and reproduces social inequalities in childhood, as this condition favors consumerist narratives of play. I conclude that the playgrounds in Yekaterinburg are bystanders of new global ecologies whereby social, political, and economic transformations become an impetus to reproduce new ways of seeing the social importance and meaning of play and playgrounds.

**Keywords:** Play; Playground; Children; Social Reproduction; Urban Transition

## INTRODUCTION: CHILDREN AND PLAYGROUNDS IN PUBLIC POLITICS

The concept of childhood was vague until the dawn of the seventeenth century (Ariès 1962; James 1993). Given this vagueness, most available literature placed little connection between idea of play and childhood aside from child's play as an ambiguous activity characterized by fluid shifts between reality and fantasy (Sutton-Smith 1997). Historical contingencies like the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution paved the way for a reconsideration of children's significance in the public sphere as complex social agents, rather than "symbolic embodiments of culture" that are only important insofar as they are future adults or "our future" (Qvortrup 2004:270). With this shift, the concept of play became fundamental to childhood, such that when the child "play[s], and play[s] alone, his whole physical, emotional, intellectual and social nature responds, and the child becomes a unit" (Curtis 1910:336).

As children gained visibility in society, public policy paid attention to children's play activities. As such, playgrounds became spaces reserved for play, a modern invention that emerged from the prevalence of urban living (Smith and Barker 2000). However, playgrounds have been subject to little political analysis. Most research on this subject is found in the fields of urban planning, psychology, early childhood education, and ergonomics (Barber et al. 2015), but rarely has it been under the study of politics. The relevance of political analysis of playgrounds is that these spaces become venues of struggle for contesting symbolic or actual control over children's activities and geographies (Katz 2002). It is necessary to understand how playgrounds embody urban transitions, as these structures allow temporary use of space—"an intentional phase," in which the "time-limited nature of the use is generally explicit" (Bishop and Williams 2012:5; see also Haydn and Temel 2006).

This article argues that understanding playground politics contributes to a better grasp of politics in urban spaces. Specifically, I examine Russian post-Soviet playgrounds as a case of how children's play lives and urban transitions are connected. The entry point of this work's analysis is Cindy Katz's (2004) "social reproduction," which links globalization to the local situations of children. Consequently, my study departs from Katz's analysis by arguing that local post-Soviet experiences are equally relevant to the changes in the play lives of children in Russian cities (Sassen 2008). Both global and local transitions are integral factors in promoting commercial playgrounds in Russia. By examining these tangible infrastructures, this article seeks to elucidate how spaces for children reflect structural and discursive changes in urban life. As this study picks up from Gordon M. Burghardt's (2005:xii) suggestion that "only when we understand the nature of play will we be able to understand how to better shape the destinies of human societies," I analyze the connection between urban spaces and children's play lives aiming to expand conventional wisdom about playgrounds to incorporate sociopolitical consciousness.

## LITERATURE ON PLAY SPACES AND THE REGULATION OF CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

### PLAYGROUNDS IN THE CHANGING URBAN WORLD

The literature on playgrounds is most vibrant in the fields of architecture, education, and psychology. Playgrounds are a conducive means for child development with respect to physical, intellectual, emotional, and social processes (Hughes 1995). Recent developments foreground playgrounds as an intervention to promote child health (Barber et al. 2015). Studies also deal with safety in playgrounds, such as injury cases (Ball 2002), and ergonomic structures that need to adjust for children's needs given increased urbanization (Nowakowski and Charytonowicz 2007). But the demand that playgrounds be safer and more "child friendly" have now been joined by yet another critique that playgrounds are starting to become "too safe" (Brunelle et al. 2016). New playgrounds no longer offer the same cognitive, sensory, and motor challenges as did previous ones. As cities change, the composition and issues faced by urban children also change and differ from one location to another.

Meanwhile, the literature has given little attention to playgrounds under societal transition, which links how children's play is integrated into changes in the global political economy. While there are studies of children's capacities as political agents (Bell 2008), their play lives are rarely examined. This implies a need for a more lucid conceptualization of how children actively occupy political spaces (Aitken 2001a; Bessant 2004; Jans 2004; Katz 2004). With this gap in mind, my article continues the scholarship on children's spaces as political spaces deserving close examination. Indeed, the geographical disparities of playground issues reveal uneven political and economic circumstances across the world where "[t]he experience of place cannot be separated from the person who lives in it" (Raittila 2012:272).

### PLAYGROUNDS AS PUBLICLY CONTROLLED SPACES

There are two processes that govern playgrounds in contemporary times. First, children's play and hence playgrounds are regulated by adults. Second, since play is an adult-controlled activity, play spaces are also influenced by adult-controlled political economy. Children's activities have been defined by and for adults (Smith and Barker 2000) and "there is no authentic or just voice for childhood because the adult world dominates that of the children" (Aitken 2001b:120). The control of children's activities was first monopolized by the institution of the family (Cavallo 1981; Thorne 1993). This was evident at the start of the seventeenth century when families took on a more emotional role in the lives of children (Ariès 1962). Control was imposed through rules about the time and activities allowed for children's play, set by adults. In the late nineteenth century, however, there was an institutional shift of control over the structuring of children's recreational activities. There was public "transfer [of] control of children's play from the children and their families to the state" (Cavallo 1981:xi). Not only did the locus of control shift from the family to the state, but it also extended into the schools (Clarke 2004). As such, children's play became publicly regulated.

Playgrounds are therefore spaces of a “campaign to control children’s play” (Howell 2008:961). With children as the central target population, playgrounds were built as political public structures designed by adults. The turn from the private enterprise of play becoming a public concern started with the worldwide early twentieth-century concern with expanding the function of government beyond a bureaucratic agenda (Curtis 1910). Playgrounds are too expensive for the average citizen to build, such that “the very idea of a playground requires that there shall be many children who shall use it in common” (Curtis 1910:123). In this way, children’s encounters with urban spaces and playgrounds are not only inherently valuable for their sense of well-being and health, but are central to how children are realized as political and public individuals.

## SOVIET TO POST-SOVIET PLAYGROUNDS: CHANGING CHILDREN, CHANGING SPACES

### DVORY AND SOVIET CHILDREN

This article takes the case of Yekaterinburg, a major city in the central Ural Mountains, to investigate how playgrounds in the Russian context manifest societal transitions and changes from its post-Soviet phase to a more neoliberal and internationalized city. Playgrounds in Russia are of particular interest because of the considerable differences in the structures of play and playgrounds in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In the USSR the state had total ownership of space, in turn communally owned by its citizens. The concept of “common space” was a taken-for-granted reality. Specifically within the urban areas of the Soviet Union, *dvory*, or communal courtyards, played an important role in the social life of residents of *kommunalki*, or communal apartment blocks, in Soviet neighborhoods. Being “an area for the socialist project” (Dixon 2013:356), *dvory* were specifically designed for leisure activities and communal services that would strengthen the idea of a collective life. As a corollary, Soviet play life was actively constructed as an element of socialist planning. In the late 1920s in particular the *dvor* served as the primary play space for children in the city, as children no longer exclusively played within the confines of their homes and instead started to meet with other children from their neighborhood (Kelly 2007:437). The *dvory* became the primary places where children played and developed social skills (437–440). Accordingly, these courtyards constituted play spaces for children that included benches and tables for adults.

Soviet childhood was idealized as the “destiny of the nation” (Rose 1999:123), which aimed to raise model Soviet citizens through state policies and institutions. As a result, Soviet children were characterized as having a “uniform identity”<sup>1</sup> and monolithic socialization with the same Soviet ideals and values (O’Dell 1978) as maintained, controlled, and reproduced by the socialist project (Knight 2009). Spe-

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Chris Jenks’s analysis that societies maintain certain understanding of childhood “through the crystallization of conventions and discourses into lasting institutional forms like families, nurseries, schools and clinics, all agencies process the child as a uniform identity” (1982:5–6).

cific to this uniform socialization were the communal spaces in *dvory* where children played. As much as play is inevitably communal to some degree, the communal character of play in the Soviet period became a conscious national effort. Soviet play life was marked by homogeneity and fixity where "kids from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok played nearly identical games, and despite the distances they shared the same childhood dreams" (Sorokina 2018). Interestingly, Soviet children's play lives reflected Soviet political and moral values such as playing "Search and Requisition," in which children usually had to follow strict rules (Humphrey 2005:52). As such, as historian Johan Huizinga put it, children create their own "forbidden spots, isolated, hedged around, hallowed, within which special rules obtain" (quoted in Cecire et. al. 2015:4).

### **SPATIAL CHANGES IN THE ROLE OF *DVORY* IN USE OF SPACE AND CHILDREN'S PLAY**

The collapse of the USSR and the transition to a market economy changed the distribution of Russia's housing stock and, consequently, the functions of *dvory*. Ownership rights were transferred to tenants, with the exception of communal apartments (Belkina and Nozdrina 2009). *Kommunalki* were converted into cooperatively owned units sold to single owners, thereby leading former owners to move separately (Mesana 2011; Utekhin 2011). This also required adjustments to divide unsubsidized costs of "communal services" such as electricity, water, and building-repair charges. With these changes, *dvory* gained new purpose and meaning to post-Soviet Russian urban dwellers.

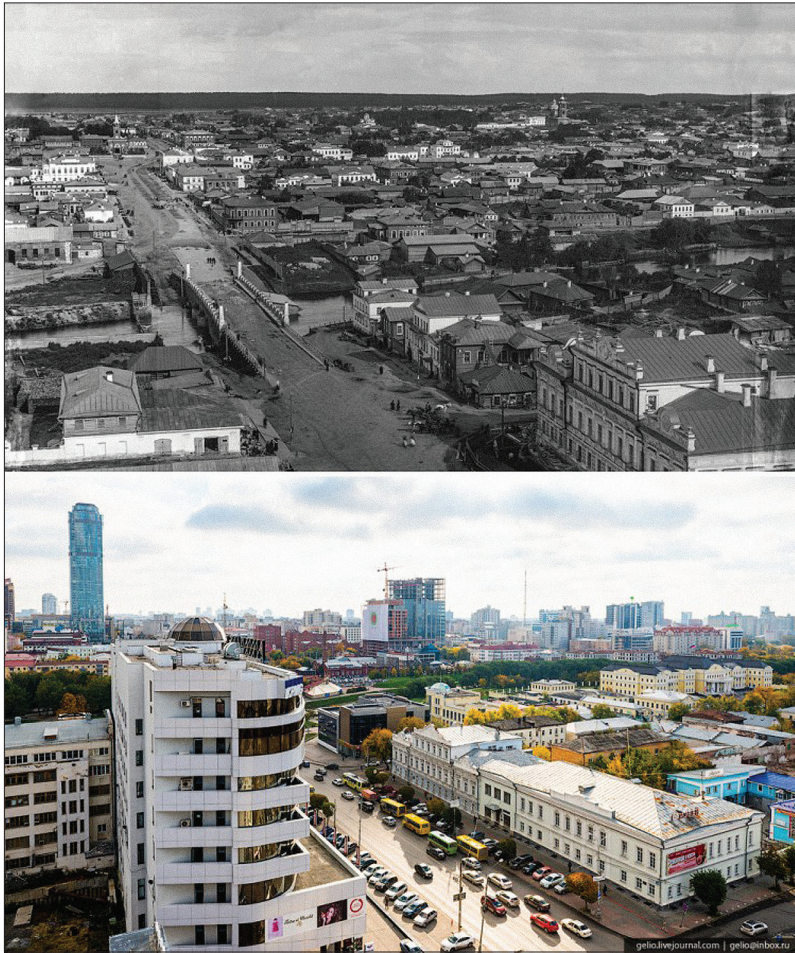
*Dvory* in post-Soviet Russia serve as spaces for some private activities, such as parking lots, and are no longer "an extension of the social planning desired by Bolshevik officials" (Dixon 2013:359). The playgrounds in old *dvory* were left as unpolished spaces in the urban fabric, retiring their role as once-lively communal spaces for children and adults alike. Playgrounds became spaces of unclear significance: do they still serve the function of a communal space, or did they turn only into memories of the Soviet life? The fleeting role of playgrounds in old *dvory* cast doubt on the ability of the *dvory* to remain relevant as communal spaces in a changing political and economic climate. The *dvory* in contemporary Russian cities can hardly become urban spaces with communal significance and social memory as the main structure of the urban fabric.

### **YEKATERINBURG AS REPRESENTATION OF RUSSIA'S CONTEMPORARY HISTORY**

Yekaterinburg is of particular interest because it was a city designed after the Soviet ideals upon which "its past exactly reflects all Russia's contemporary history" (Artemov et al. 2008:36). It is no wonder that Yekaterinburg has always been active in developing international ties as it is essential for this city's survival to establish global connections. Given that Yekaterinburg was a "metropolitan rather than a provincial city" (36), it has a history of several economic transitions from iron production to copper-coin production centers to gold mining and trading. These transitions continued into the post-Soviet period, one of the most striking of which was the change in housing spaces, including *dvory* (Koncheva and Zaleskiy 2016), where



changes to children's play lives become evident. By examining spaces for children in Yekaterinburg, this article disentangles these play spaces as fragmentary objects of economic and political transition from Soviet to post-Soviet Russia. Given the various spatial and temporal intersections that urban children and playgrounds face, this article examines the processes through which Soviet play spaces were left as urban voids. I seek to understand how playgrounds operate as spaces of political and economic interests in the urban polity, rather than a simple set of distinct areas where urban residents spend time.



**Figure 1.** Changes to Yekaterinburg: Ulitsa Malysheva (formerly, Pokrovskii Prospekt) has been transformed from having more residential areas in the nineteenth century (top image) to having more commercial spaces and parking lots in the twenty-first century (bottom image)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Source: "Mezhdu etimi foto – tselaiia zhizn': Kak za veka menialsia oblik Ekaterinburga," E1.ru, May 13, 2016. [https://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news\\_id-443845.html](https://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news_id-443845.html).

This study uses a combination of primary and secondary data for discursive analysis. Primary data is derived from observation of the city's playgrounds, both Soviet and post-Soviet. Soviet playgrounds were selected at random as this research takes into consideration the uniformity of these playgrounds. Private playgrounds were selected based on their findability in Google Maps searches. For both categories, I examine the design and locations to compare Soviet and post-Soviet play spaces. Secondary data is drawn from news archives, incorporating television broadcasts and online newscasts<sup>3</sup> from the last five years. These news reports are gathered based on the results from search engines, and the analysis includes the most frequently occurring news items from different sites. These sources are also used to describe how Soviet playgrounds are used in the post-Soviet period. Additionally, I analyze promotional ads and social media<sup>4</sup> pages of commercial playgrounds to explore how commercial playgrounds operate as compared to Soviet playgrounds. Finally, I use Google Map Maker to visualize the spread of playgrounds across Yekaterinburg.

## **GLOBAL SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND INTERNAL FORCES: A FRAMEWORK**

### **THE GLOBAL REGULATION OF PLAY: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF PLAYGROUNDS IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY**

In the globalized world more political agents have joined the regulation of children's activities. This is evident in the growing number of state-led and nonstate agencies (e.g., UNICEF, SIMPOC, Save the Children) committed specifically to establishing programs and policies directed towards children's human development. As part of globalization, children's activities become more regulated to the extent that "opportunities for autonomous, culture-building play are severely restricted ... to a completely regimented schedule of after-school activities or supervised play (Katz 2004:174). This reflects social reproduction, which entails mechanisms that maintain and reproduce people and places to sustain a given system of material production. Post-Soviet Russian cities are reflective of Katz's framework wherein children's play and playgrounds become part and parcel of perpetuating the reproduction of existing social relations and status quo—social reproduction. For instance, the emergence of the so-called KFC playgrounds or playgrounds found in establishments such as malls and other shopping centers (Woolley 2008) maintains globalized social relations, or a specific process of maintaining world market integration. For instance,

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<sup>3</sup> Main sources of broadcast news are: Glavnye novosti Ekaterinburga (Studiia 41), UOTK Er-mak, GTPK Ural, ATN, OTV Ekaterinburg, E1.ru Ekaterinburg Online, Telekanal "My i gorod," RIA Novyi den', TASS TV, and BOF "Svoi deti." Sources for news online are: RIA Novyi den', E1.ru Ekaterinburg Online, RuPosters, Informatsionnoe agentstvo "Evropeisko-aziatskie novosti," Nasha gazeta Ngzt.ru, MK-Ural, Federal'noe agentstvo novostei, Rossiiskoe informatsionnoe agentstvo Ura.ru, and the official website of the City of Yekaterinburg.

<sup>4</sup> Social media sites include VKontakte pages of the group Detskie ploshchadki i atraktsionny Yekaterinburg (<https://vk.com/ekbrides>), the playground Kids Park ([https://vk.com/kidspark\\_ekb](https://vk.com/kidspark_ekb)), and playground production company KSIL-Yekaterinburg (<https://vk.com/club49057554>).

transnational corporations keep national bases as they operate globally (Hirst and Thompson 1996). In Yekaterinburg, IKEA provides playgrounds with play equipment commodified in various ways—safe, clean, technologically advanced, and distinctive—which fit the specific lifestyles and identities of post-Soviet income earners.

Just because global connections were integral to Yekaterinburg's history does not imply that this city participated in social reproduction as described by Katz. Social reproduction is a framework that considers how local everyday activities support and maintain global production under capitalism. However, it is clear that the Soviet Yekaterinburg maintained global connection under the communist ideals. Here, playing as a local activity is designed under the Soviet prototype, which is why children have the same design of playgrounds. Hence, what shifted during the transition to post-Soviet Yekaterinburg is the goal behind building global connections. In the post-Soviet Yekaterinburg local activities including play become forms of consumption, whereby "to play is to consume rather than to produce, to absorb rather than to invent, and finally to be an object rather than to be the subject of history" (Kapur 2005:92). Selling and buying "fun" feeds "entertainment retail" (Ritzer 1999) with its endless procession of add-ons, accessories, and/or "fun"-related themes in play places. This is also aided by the social media promotion of commercial play places. In turn, being spaces mainly for children's play, playgrounds serve as venues of social reproduction, supported by political economic, cultural, and material relations, in complex and structured ways. As such, playgrounds are social as much as material entities. Consequently, playgrounds exhibit a multiplicity of characters as structures that produce and reproduce various interests. Playgrounds are spaces that reveal the structures of geographical disparities, thereby perpetuating "the reproduction of the population and the means by which people produce their subsistence" (Katz 2004:x).

### INTERNAL FORCES: A SOVIET KIND OF URBAN TRANSITION

Yet for all its appeal, globalization still falls short in accounting for the post-Soviet urban transition. While there is little disagreement in the literature that urban public spaces have been infiltrated by globalization with increasing privatization and commodification (Mitchell 1995; Aurigi and Graham 1997), the urban transition in the post-Soviet world is not a simple product of external forces. This article argues that changes in territorial norms and social stratification reassembled the play spaces for post-Soviet children. Specifically, two internal forces were intimately linked with the shift towards the prevalence of commercial playgrounds in the post-Soviet period: the combination of wealth redistribution and remodeled *dvory* has created favorable conditions for commercial playgrounds to emerge. It is through understanding the role played by the *dvor* and its configurations that the layered structure of post-Soviet developments in playgrounds can be grasped more deeply. The notion of play therefore is found on both local and global events beneath the cover allegedly cast over it by the forces of globalization and international influence.

Being mindful of Saskia Sassen's (2003, 2008) concept of "denationalization," in which spatial changes are not entirely immediate products of globalizing forces, I suggest that these conditions are not simple reactions to the insatiable appetite of



the development project occurring in the international arena. Rather, it is important to examine the internal forces and "range of conditions and dynamics that are to be distinguished from those global city components in that they are still coded and represented as local and national" (Sassen 2008:3). These national components combine with global forces that facilitate urban transitions. This complicates the conventional analysis of how globalization independently infiltrates and transforms local spaces. As global citizens, consumers, and policy makers, it is important for political agents to have a better understanding of this specific urban transition in order to proactively engage with local urban changes. Playgrounds cannot be mere reminders of a less convincing, but still needed starting point for a reflection of the conventional local-global relations in urban spaces.

### **URBAN STRUCTURAL TRANSITIONS OF URAL PLAYGROUNDS: METABOLIZING THE GLOBAL KIDS OF YEKATERINBURG**

A crucial dimension of Russia's urban transition is the rejection of the collective "Soviet mentality" and culture (Mamontov, Kozhevnikova, and Radyukova 2014) in favor of a more individualistic global culture. As the Russian Federation moves up from an upper middle income to a high income country<sup>5</sup> (World Bank 2018), this transition welcomes a new batch of urban children into a specific moment of turning away from collectivism and absorbing the individualism of the global commercialized culture. Combined with children's vulnerable status, the political-economic shift in Russia brought changes in how children are perceived, especially in urban spaces. This transition is evident in how suppliers of private playground equipment constantly promote their "world class" production. For instance, Yekaterinburg has a branch of KSIL-Balteks, a playground equipment manufacturing company that promotes itself as having services that "extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific and cover more than 15 countries"<sup>6</sup> and as having been certified by the "European Committee for Standardization."<sup>7</sup> Ads like this demonstrate how Yekaterinburg's younger people are now "growing up global" (Katz 2004) and are becoming an "organic part of [their] society" (Burgess 2003:159). This structural shift occurred along with a redefined concept of childhood, a new focus on safety, and a bureaucratization of play that dictates playground materials, construction, and design (Frost 2012).

### **BEYOND GLOBALIZATION: RISE OF THE INCOME CLASS AND "NEW CONVENIENCES"**

#### **CLASS-BASED OPTIMIZATION OF *DVORY***

Post-Soviet wealth redistribution changed the function of *dvory* as housing stocks became dependent on the income classes, replacing the egalitarian communal lifestyle. This transition towards the global market's logic of portfolio management is

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<sup>5</sup> "World Bank Country and Lending Groups," World Bank, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519>.

<sup>6</sup> KSIL-Yekaterinburg company VKontakte page, <https://vk.com/club49057554>.

<sup>7</sup> KSIL company website, page "Safety," <http://ksil.com/en/safety/>.

not surprising (Brown 2015). A collection of literature has shown that the last batch of children who experienced the Soviet life exemplified cynicism and self-interest as opposed to the idealistic and nonmaterialistic image attributed to Soviet children (Kelly 2007). Late-Soviet children can be characterized as having considerable spending power and with little interest in maintaining the idea of stability found in the Soviet era (Markowitz 2000). According to author Linor Goralik, with their cynicism, the last generation of Soviet children who were able to be on top of the new hierarchy easily abandoned the communal system associated with the *dvor* in order to adjust to the new system of stability (quoted in Knight 2009:798). This is evident in the ways new housing constructions were made to appeal to the upper-middle- to high-income classes. Young professionals and businesspeople envision converting Soviet *dvory* into European ones, which entails exterior as well as interior apartment remodeling. However, urban dwellers with little disposable income are less likely to pay for such extensive remodeling of buildings and *dvory*. Hence, old *dvory* were left unimproved by the lower-income classes who could not afford to convert old *dvory* from a playground and laundry area into European models.

Remodeled *dvory* are therefore culminations of two intertwined events. The first was an economic demand to turn away from the alleged inefficiency of nonmarket structures. The second was the increasing value of autonomy and individuality. These two imperatives—the economic and the individualistic—combined extremely well under neoliberalism. *Dvory* as recreational spaces were incompatible with the global market's virtue of productivity. In post-Soviet Russia one is liable to hear such objections against old *dvory*: the spaces that hold nostalgic memories but are not useful in terms of space efficiency and speed. The urban spaces were filled with imperatives of productivity, profitability, and the rule of the market. It is important to distinguish a mere difference from an incompatibility. A difference implies a gap between forces, yet they are not necessarily antagonistic with each other. Incompatibility means irreconcilable status between poles. The transition from Soviet to post-Soviet urban life witnessed the latter. Elements of life that were once associated with the *dvor*, such as living and housing arrangements, family life, recreation, and play, became incompatible with the inevitable demands of modernity. The new demands of class society not only established tension but also posed a degree of incompatibility with the socialist-based project inherent in *dvory*. The new housing systems, new family life, new interpretation of recreation and play, together with the decline of communal values, ushered in the fall of *dvory*-as-recreational-spaces and gave rise to *dvory*-as-spaces-of-efficiency. Against this backdrop, autonomy and "choice" replaced community and shared living spaces. This is an inevitable consequence as Russia entered the global market when the idea of "New Public Management" was promoting an antagonism to public red tape. In this way, neoliberalism shifted public institutions away from the socialist project.

As Yekaterinburg faced the post-Soviet urban transition, the purpose of playgrounds also changed. The post-Soviet urban transition in Yekaterinburg has shown less fixation with communal spaces as it turned away from communism. Even the use of the word *dvor* has changed. For instance, one company named itself Nash Dvor (Our

Yard), yet it produces private playground equipment with a purpose distant from the *dvory* of Soviet times. Moreover, closer examination of the company's mission statement shows that there is evidence of an awareness of transition from Soviet life to the current urban situation. While the company aims at bringing back physical play, as opposed to digital play, the solution it offers is a private one:

Twenty years ago, the Russian family looked like this—two kids, mom, and dad. Ten years ago there were two children and a mother, and my dad devoted his free time to business. Now usually two kids are on their own, and father and mother are behind tablets or phones in different corners of the room.... So, sometimes it's better to remove the tablet and get your favorite book or just go for a walk together on the street or play soccer.... we will help.<sup>8</sup>

Together with Yekaterinburg's history of global links, the abandonment of Soviet ideals created momentum for the flourishing of more commercialized and privatized play in line with globalization. While public playgrounds were relatively numerous in Soviet times, some of these playgrounds now exhibit characteristics of idle spaces or "urban voids," referring to unutilized, underutilized, or abandoned spaces and premises in urban areas with outdated uses (Kim 2017). Indeed, these old Soviet playgrounds have become mere memorials to government investment in child play as part of the Soviet Plan.

### FRAGMENTED NARRATIVES: MELTING POT OF COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUALISTIC IDEALS

The contemporary situation of public playgrounds in Yekaterinburg reveals a slightly assorted character, implying how Russian playgrounds sit uneasily in the patchworks of events of the post-Soviet transition. In the past five years the news, in both video broadcasts and written accounts relating to Yekaterinburg playgrounds, have presented a range of events that reflect both favorable and unfavorable attitudes towards public playgrounds.

Interestingly, in 2018 a municipal program was launched called "Formation of the Modern Urban Environment for 2018–2022," aimed at renovating public playgrounds in Yekaterinburg. The reconstruction will be carried out using the city budget.<sup>9</sup> This desire to repair playgrounds has also been expressed by residents living in the city center, and there are also occurrences that reflect the importance of public playgrounds, with private individuals and groups dedicated to protecting and reviving playgrounds and public initiatives investing in playgrounds. For instance, residents near Ulitsa Michurina, 132 and Ulitsa Bazhova, 161 fought with the local government to protect the playgrounds from being demolished.<sup>10</sup> This may seem to be

<sup>8</sup> Nash Dvor website, page "Mission," <https://nash-dvor.com/en/about>.

<sup>9</sup> "Letom za schet biudzheta rekonstruiuiut 57 dvorov: Polnyi spisok adresov," 66.ru, May 15, 2018. <https://66.ru/news/society/211239/>.

<sup>10</sup> "Vmesto detskoj ploshchadki budet avtostoianka: V tsentre Ekaterinburga razgorelas' voina za dvorovuiu territoriiu," Novyi den', May 19, 2017. <https://newdaynews.ru/ekb/603257.html>; "Zhiteli doma v Ekaterinburge poprosili snesti detskuiu ploshchadmu radi parkovki," RuPosters, May 20, 2017. <https://ruposters.ru/news/20-05-2017/poprosili-parkovku-vmesto-ploshhadki>.

evidence of public investment in (or sentimental attachment to) old playgrounds. However, looking at the map of playgrounds (see Figure 2)<sup>11</sup> it becomes clear that these renovations are strategically allotted for playgrounds near the city center. What appears is a selective public investment in playgrounds in the most profitable areas of the city. This suggests that, although there is some public investment, it does not resemble the Soviet ideal of collective living. Rather, this urban plan incentivizes relocation to city centers, which in turn stimulates more economic activities in the city. Moreover, before the allocation of city budget to public playgrounds, play spaces at the periphery of Yekaterinburg have been associated with various unfavorable events such as children being injured, playgrounds being abandoned, demolition of playgrounds, hazardous incidents near playgrounds, adults using playgrounds to threaten the public, and public disputes related to playgrounds. What this means is a scarcity of “play-friendly” public playgrounds in areas of Yekaterinburg that truly need renovation the most.



**Figure 2.** Locations of playgrounds to be renovated under the city project “Formation of the Modern Urban Environment for 2018–2022”

The selective attention to public playgrounds in Yekaterinburg is a symptom of an urban transition due to the decreasing appeal of communal living and the charm of individuality. This is especially striking for a Russian because of the Soviet past. The disregard of play places can be read as a symptom of Yekaterinburg’s modernization as it gradually discards, albeit not totally, some of its communal practices. Play places are not exempted from this transition, as these spaces increasingly embody a less collective character. Not only are old play places left void, but until 2018 these

<sup>11</sup> Playgrounds slated for renovation were listed in “Letom za schet biudzheta rekonstruiuiut 57 dvorov: Polnyi spisok adresov,” 66.ru, May 15, 2018. <https://66.ru/news/society/211239/>.

spaces were also not considered for repurposing or incorporated into plans to transform public land to be more accessible to all members of society for development (Ostrom 1990). Not being repurposed is an important aspect of the urban transition towards individualism, because repurposing operates under the concept of the "commons" and shared public spaces (Ostrom 1990), which is seen as a Soviet feature. The more individualistic character of new playgrounds complements the set of post-Soviet individuals who face a milieu in which one must find private solutions to public problems (Bauman 2000). For instance, several broadcasts about the harm caused by dilapidated playgrounds and by people using playgrounds for nonplay activities reflect the idea that these spaces are no longer fit for shared activities. On the other hand, new playscapes are emerging as play opportunities in private schools, shopping malls, and commercial spaces are offered for child recreation. Old playgrounds are converted into parking lots, which indicates prioritizing more individualized demands over establishing spaces for common activities. While it can be argued that parking lots are "shared" spaces, the idea of parking is in itself an act with a private goal.

Another practical rationale for leaving playgrounds as urban voids is their "permanent-minded" designs, which are less adaptable to urban changes (Bishop and Williams 2012). This permanence is reflective of a Soviet character. The rigid structures of Yekaterinburg playgrounds demonstrate no strategic consideration that allows repurposing for shared activities of children in the city. Many old playgrounds in the peripheral *raiony* (city districts) are left neglected and underutilized due to the concentration of public investment in the city center. Subsequently, it is rather difficult to restructure these play areas, especially when these spaces are perceived as "void" from an economic perspective. There is an absence of sufficient space for new play equipment. This exemplifies that playgrounds may not be spaces that survive in a communal manner (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012) but adapt through privatization. In addition, private playgrounds now have social media accounts and websites, which foster the selective visibility of these play spaces compared to the playgrounds in *dvory*. Public playgrounds, on the other hand, are not listed in any database, making it difficult to monitor them for renovation. Public playgrounds are considered old-fashioned relics of Soviet times, acknowledged only as mere open spaces until they are found to have economic value—for example, as parking lots.

The fragmented character of public playgrounds has taken place under Yekaterinburg's urban transformations. Structural transformations are apparent in the construction of buildings that either causes playgrounds to be demolished or to become "urban voids" due to their inappropriate location in a corporate setting. The combined efforts to establish playgrounds both from (occasionally) the government and (mostly) nongovernment organizations and private individuals suggest a widening range of agents in governing children's lives. Just as the economic transformation is linked to globalization, the interplay of many agents in managing children activities cannot be isolated from this scenario, as some of the efforts in establishing playgrounds come from foreign aid. All these events simultaneously take place with the establishment of new commercial playgrounds, especially in the city center. Indeed,



along with the changes in economic, demographic, and discursive spheres in the domestic and international arena, the playgrounds in Yekaterinburg have become bystanders to changes in social policies.

### REACTION TO “NEW CONVENIENCES”

The old *dvory* playgrounds cannot cope with the demands for the “new conveniences” experienced in the post-Soviet period and the ideals parents now have for their post-Soviet children. These “new conveniences” can range from completeness of playground equipment to spaces that respond to the shyness of children to accommodating parents needing to do tasks while children play. This kind of elevated demand is also an inevitable part of modernity, for those who have relatively more in life also react more to complex issues by virtue of their capitals (Bourdieu 1984). Commercial playgrounds, on the other hand, successfully tapped into the new sense of inconvenience. Whereas Soviet playground facilities usually require children to improvise toys and imagine facilities out of what is available in the communal space (Kelly 2007:436–437), commercial playgrounds provide complete equipment for structured play.

### CONVENIENT FUN: PLAY AS LEISURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF “FUN”

The Soviet period transformed the parent-child relationship by imposing a uniformity of familial practices. Being the “destiny of the nation” (Rose 1999:123), children were seen as unidimensional beings whose main task was to absorb communist ideals. This is evident in how Soviet playgrounds were identically designed. However, in post-Soviet Yekaterinburg children are seen as multidimensional. Commercial playgrounds particularly embody this by placing an emphasis on variation in equipment, novelty, and choice (see Figure 8). Here, commercial playgrounds reconcile children’s romantic association with “naturalness” with “artificial” urban transformations, which were seen as “symbolically incompatible” (Jones 2002:17). In post-Soviet Yekaterinburg social reproduction is evident as the market relentlessly pushes outward, colonizing more spaces for commercialized play under the discourse of “leisure and fun.” These modern playgrounds capitalize on the natural need of children to play and have *fun* in the urban setting. These commercial spaces deliver a sense of awe, a world of possibilities—even if they do so by relying on the decidedly disenchanting marketing equations of calculability, predictability, and consumer control. Commercial playgrounds fit alongside what George Ritzer (1999) calls “cathedrals of consumption” such as Disney World, fast-food chains, and superstores, being sanctuaries of comfort and fun. Children’s activities and time have also been colonized in an era convinced that a desire for “comfort and convenience” is normal. The economic restructuring can be characterized by the production of fantasy and novelty that dominate the market, where play comes in a commodified form. Thus, commercial playgrounds discursively construct the geographic space that children inhabit, imbuing play spaces with the meanings that generate a socio-spatial consciousness of fun.

### CONVENIENT LOVE: FUN IS THE NEW LOVE

One major urban shift is related to how commercialized playgrounds have replaced the old Soviet playgrounds' role in cultivating family norms of communal living and uniformity. In the contemporary Yekaterinburg, commercial playgrounds encourage a culture of consumption in the name of love and care, which are now standard family norms. This shift in family norms can be seen in how the new play places promote activities that connect parenting with child play. For instance, social media ads attract mothers by starting with "We are mothers who know the happiness that parenthood brings." The text below is about the commercial playground Kids Park located at Ulitsa Iasnaia:

We are mothers who know the happiness that parenthood brings! There is happiness in bringing a smile to your child everyday as they are the most precious people. And at the same time, we understand that you do not own your time. And sometimes you may want to watch your favorite movie, try on a dress, or eat fast food.... While at the same time knowing that your child is in a place that is fun, safe, comfortable. In a place where they have the ability to communicate with peers and learn something new and interesting.<sup>12</sup>

In this ad the "happiness of parenthood" conveys how the concept of play is integrated with parenthood, conflating "love and care" with providing a quality play experience for offspring. With the normative inclination towards care for children, play has become a consumer good that constantly changes under the discursive field of consumption. Love and care are used to aid a "new means of consumption" (Ritzer 1999), including theme parks, shopping malls, and megastores like Toy "R" Us, which show how the notions of childhood and play have changed from the past. This is paired with the seeming redefinition of childhood at the turn of the twenty-first century—that is, children's activities are not exclusive to the younger part of the population. Commercial play places are designed to attract the attention not only of children but also that of the parents. This is especially pertinent to millennial parents who have witnessed the transition and expansion of commercial play spaces (McKendrick, Fielder, and Bradford 1998; McKendrick, Bradford, and Fielder 2000; Aitken 2001a).

### CONVENIENT CO-PARENTING: PARENTING IN TRANSITION

While both Soviet and post-Soviet play activities involve "structure" or design, the way play in these periods is "structured" is very different. In the Soviet era play was designed to allow improvisation from children, since most equipment was less complicated (Kelly 2007). So while Soviet playgrounds were identical (Sorokina 2018), children were able to have free play and hone their creativity. In post-Soviet times, however, play becomes more assisted, with playgrounds having adults to guide children along with consumable built-in games like fishing, puzzles, shooting balls, and so on, constructing children as consumers rather than creators (see example in Fig-

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<sup>12</sup> Kids Park playground VKontakte page, [https://vk.com/kidspark\\_ekb](https://vk.com/kidspark_ekb).

ure 6). Both free play and structured play are important—free play fosters creativity while structured play nurtures systematic thinking. However, a focus on structured play is seen in depictions of children in the social media accounts of new playgrounds, showing the children having objectives in their play activities such as scientific learning or logical thinking (see Figure 4). While Soviet playgrounds are hospitable to free play, it becomes more challenging to incorporate structured play (i.e., more facilities for logical, goal-oriented playground materials).



**Figure 3.** Children play on a street in Kemerovo, Eastern Siberia, May 16, 1979<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 4.** Kids Park, Ulitsa Iasnaia, 2, Yekaterinburg<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sergei Ilnitsky Photography, <https://ilnitsky.photoshelter.com/image/I0000migUlhMYIbQ>.

<sup>14</sup> Kids Park playground VKontakte page, [https://vk.com/kidspark\\_ekb](https://vk.com/kidspark_ekb).



**Figure 5.** Ulitsa Serova, Yekaterinburg<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 6.** Playground Veselyi os'minog, Ulitsa Amundsena, 63, Yekaterinburg<sup>16</sup>

The commodification of play has intensified as more and more middle-class families rely on the incomes of both parents. This is observable in how parenting has become more and more reliant on resources—childrearing by babysitters, childcare centers, and play spaces—that were once only available to the very wealthy. Consequently, middle-class parents tend to subscribe to a consumerist parenting ethos together with the rise of “helicopter parenting”<sup>17</sup> (Ginott 1969). Parents hover over their child, intervening in the structuring of their child’s leisure time more than did earlier generations. Whereas old public playgrounds are structures of free play, which does not support middle-class consumerist parenting (Ritzer 1999), commercial playgrounds may represent the early stages of induction of children into an increasingly commodified adult culture, with the middle-class idea of “parenting.”

<sup>15</sup> Photo by the author.

<sup>16</sup> Playground advertisement from [https://ekb.zoon.ru/entertainment/detskaya\\_ploschadka\\_attraksionov\\_veselyj\\_osminog\\_na\\_ulitse\\_amundsena/](https://ekb.zoon.ru/entertainment/detskaya_ploschadka_attraksionov_veselyj_osminog_na_ulitse_amundsena/).

<sup>17</sup> The term “helicopter parent” is used to describe parents who hover over their children’s activities like a helicopter (Bernstein and Triger 2010).





**Figure 7.** Ulitsa Serova, 45, Yekaterinburg<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 8.** IKEA, Ulitsa Metallurgov, 87, Yekaterinburg<sup>19</sup>

The play places provided by commercial institutions allow parents to perform other activities such as shopping, eating, and relaxing without feeling neglectful of their children (see Figure 8). Consumption can alleviate parents' alienation from labor and provide moments of commodified pleasure. This co-parental role of commercial playgrounds seems to offset some of the more brutal consequences of the neoliberal regime—deskilling, throwing people out of work, and other harsh realities of the capitalist market. No matter what meaning is attributed to this fetish, such play

<sup>18</sup> Photo by the author.

<sup>19</sup> IKEA reviews page on Foursquare City Guide, customer photo, <https://pt.foursquare.com/v/%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B0--ikea/4c8b70b8012b95218b1fb42c?openPhotoId=51b87778498ef4c05577ea48>.



spaces integrate children into the adult culture. Indeed, commercial playgrounds are indicative less of the homogenizing tendency of globalization than of the affirmation of the income differentiation in Russia. And while the current generation of parents might not always, or even often, associate the commercial play spaces they bring their children to with subscribing to global capitalism, having their children play at commercialized playgrounds indicates doing co-parenting with the capitalists. And as global capital, with its homogenizing marketing strategies and enticing cathedrals of consumption, expands, so presumably do the cultural effects of play commodification intensify.

### THE WINNING NARRATIVE: CHILDREN TURN PUBLIC, PLAYGROUNDS TURN PRIVATE

The presence of private play spaces demonstrates that Russia's economic transition has penetrated the play lives of post-Soviet children. As the discourse of play shifted towards leisure, post-Soviet children became consumers of play and play places. It is not surprising then that children in Yekaterinburg have become a special market for the private play spaces as the city's child population continues to grow at an average annual rate of 5.8 percent over five years (2012–2017). Children's play embodies the transition towards seeking private solutions to common needs (Sennett 1974) as "[t]he citizen is now conceived as an individual whose most pressing obligation to society is to empower her or himself privately" (Ouellette and Hay 2008:31). As an example, playgrounds as private projects are also becoming popular. The text below, from the playground equipment company Wood's, promotes playgrounds as private projects:

Individual-design playground for small private yard in Yekaterinburg.

Main products [from] Wood's are intended for private use in house yards, dachas, kindergartens, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, the word "yard" (*uchastok*) means something different in this context from what it implied in the Soviet era, which was a space for communal use. This shows a stark difference in how spaces of play were transformed by the ideological shift from a collectivist standpoint into a privatized approach. It is no coincidence then that only in 2018 did public playgrounds in Yekaterinburg receive attention for construction through the city budget. Although there are myriad marginal social benefits to children's play and personal growth, the return on investment, from a financial point of view, is rather more abstract, intangible, and hard to calculate, if they are to create reports of tangible accomplishment. As a result, private play reproduces itself in an era where public life shifts to an "individualized, privatized version of modernity" (Bauman 2000:8).

<sup>20</sup> "Nashi raboty [Foto]: Ekaterinburg," Wood's, December 25, 2018, <https://woods-ural.ru/posts/3856663>.

## THE LOSING NARRATIVE: YEKATERINBURG WITHIN THE TENSIONS IN THE URBAN PLAY SPACES

Yekaterinburg's public playgrounds display a character of uncertainty, vulnerability, and constant risk due to the flux of both centralized institutions and private enterprise in producing the activity of play. These public playgrounds' situation does not exist in isolation from public playgrounds in the rest of the world and is located within the context of wider playground issues. While there are differences in playground issues—such as the questionable ecological soundness of equipment, being “too safe,”<sup>21</sup> or issues of accessibility and availability—these spaces share a common experience of being susceptible to the changes of the cities in which they are located.

Public disinvestments in children's play are therefore consequences of a larger disinvestment from public subsidies for children of the poor, as urban children have little economic value in their present condition. The noticeable change in public (dis)investment in public playgrounds in Yekaterinburg is a product of many agents that partake in the regulation of children's activities, verifying that the concept of play is “always in the process of being made” (Massey 2005:9). The neglect by local government can be traced to its weakening role in regulating children's lives as it is replaced by private enterprises and humanitarian organizations.

## THE FALLOUT: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF CHILDHOOD INEQUALITY

An inequality of agency is present such that only middle- and upper-class families are given alternatives—to lobby for or to choose private playgrounds. Whereas the middle and upper classes can be active about playground issues, the poor remain passive. And, indeed, in Yekaterinburg a community of neighbors lobbied for playgrounds on Prospekt Lenina not to be converted into parking lots.<sup>22</sup> Those who can lobby for children's play spaces are those with stable homes, with sufficient cultural capital to understand the importance of play, and with enough social capital to form groups that will be heard. This kind of agency is not as accessible to the poor as to the upper classes. While news items include reports of child injury in playgrounds, some residents can do little more than remain thankful to the donors for public playgrounds or adjust to what the playgrounds can offer. For instance, when a young mother who brought her children to Pavlik Morozov Park learned that the park's trampoline had safety violations, she decided that it was better to use the swing. This user of public playgrounds did not opt to completely prohibit her children from playing there.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Such playgrounds are considered insufficient for further cognitive and physical development of children since their designs prioritize safety over challenging children's abilities and promoting learning (Barber et al. 2015).

<sup>22</sup> “Zhiteli doma na Bazhova poprosili snesti detskuiu ploshchadku vo dvore, chtoby postroit' parkovku,” E1.ru, May 19, 2017. [https://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news\\_id-468617.html](https://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news_id-468617.html).

<sup>23</sup> “Batuty na detskikh ploshchadkakh Ekaterinburga proverili na bezopasnost’,” OTV, June 8, 2017. <http://www.obltv.ru/news/society/batuty-na-detskikh-ploshchadkakh-ekaterinburga-proverili-na-bezopasnost/>.

The middle class is better able to afford private playgrounds or go to commercial play spaces. However, the poor must passively wait for free or sponsored play activities from humanitarian and civic groups. While, in theory, the poor can make demands for public play spaces, there is little agency for them to do so. And given that commercial playgrounds offer the middle class affordable (at least for them) play lobbying may not incentivize this class anymore.

As a result, the more middle-class families are able to benefit from commercialized play spaces, the more it drives the poor children into the fringes of public disinvestment because no one can lobby for public play spaces anymore. The poor can only passively rework and become resilient, settling for old playgrounds, as they do not possess the same degree of agency as that of the middle class. The public voice that could create resistance to state disinvestment in children's activities is divided because the middle class has a lower-hassle alternative.

## CONCLUSION

### CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN TRANSITION

This article shows how broader ideological codes that perpetuate structural relationships of childhood inequality are found in the discursively elaborated playground issues. The significance of globalization in terms of children's play can be seen not only in the physical aspects of the play spaces. This study argues that it is the poor children who feel the pain and shock of the transition more than other children in the same generation and more than poor children of the previous generations. As John Stiglitz (2002) reminds us, globalization does not promise equality and proglobalization policies can be costly, which may produce instability and make domestic policies subordinate to foreign demands to avoid external shocks. The public playgrounds of Yekaterinburg are not only victims of industrial policy and general economic restructuring; rather, these structures are contained within the context of a changing discourse on childhood, combined with demographic and economic shifts.

The discursive and economic transitions of childhood and play have opened doors to the appropriation of playgrounds within the context of an urban transition. In what appears to be a simple venue of economic expansion that shows the dynamics between play space businesses and underprivileged children, there can be found a complex power relationship between the city and its child residents. Additionally, the way that commercial playgrounds depict the idea of play for children demonstrates the assertion that physical space and geography have become less essential to people's identity construction (Appadurai 1996; Castells 2000). As Arjun Appadurai (1996) claims, landscapes are being subsumed by various other scapes in constituting emerging identities—in this case, children identities are formed and reproduced through globalization and internationalization. All these discursive changes serve as opportunities to advance a broader neoliberal agenda, cultivating new consumers while capitalizing on children needs as justification. This process of neoliberal reconstruction is best

understood as an event that coincided with the transitioning of childhood in a transitioning economic situation.

### CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC POLICY

Post-Soviet playgrounds illustrate the following assertions: First, the personal play lives of children are influenced by external events. This can be seen in the transition from play spaces of *dvory* to the emergence of private playgrounds. Second, while public policies, such as the reconstruction of playgrounds in Yekaterinburg, may have good intentions, these may still be insufficient in themselves to ensure equality and human development. This is evident in the list of Yekaterinburg playgrounds to be renovated, which are mostly within the vicinity of the city center. Third, while there are disinvestments, deprivations, and uncertainties stemming from institutional imperfections, public policies, and market “failures,” such problems are by no means confined to economic structures and policy alone, as demonstrated by the discursive changes to play as a result of changes in housing provision from the Soviet to post-Soviet eras.

What may be good in theory may be challenged by the risks of noninclusive public policies and implementation. There is no one way to respond to this condition, and any attempt to find solutions requires a deeper examination than looking at policies alone; for instance, it requires a shift in the rules of discourse in the economic, political, and social spheres to foster both economic and human development. This is not an argument against the new dominant discourses of play but, rather, a reminder of how particular discourses of play have been integrated into the wider urban and global processes. It is within such a nuanced understanding of play that insightful suggestions can be made for children to be able to maximize their childhoods in urban areas and enjoy the benefits of public policy. Yekaterinburg playgrounds do not exist in isolation from wider cultural expressions and have long served as spaces of cultural and economic conditioning. It is within this world of social reproduction that Yekaterinburg children play and live their lives.

Indeed, what this analysis reveals is that playgrounds are not just constructed by human beings—they also narrate social stories in ways that may not be necessarily recognized or appreciated. The challenge for public policy, to the extent that it lets the private sector take over children’s play, is to arrive at a reasonable balance of risks and rewards. The changes in the Yekaterinburg playscapes made visible the political and tacitly accepted assumptions of spatial dynamics in the social production of playscapes. Clearly, the patterns of how play is made available to children are closely interwoven with the patterns of economic change in the city and in the country in general. Play is not sharply separated from other urban transformations. Children construct their own play lives within the bounds of their physical geographies. It is within this generally highly complicated adult territory that the “dynamic trajectories” of children’s outcomes materialize (Deleuze 1997). Finally, as a response to the limited ways modernity permits children to play (Benjamin 1969), this calls for public policy to observe how children’s play lives are affected by global and local

transformations. Indeed, it seems that while the inclination of scholars interested in urban spaces is to explore the known, central, established centers, we must not forget to also explore the accumulation, development, and distribution of spatial events in more distant and less well-known hubs such as playgrounds. To arrive at the sweet spot of obtaining social benefits and mitigating social deprivation of children is among the central hopes of this piece of research.

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## «УДАЛЕНИЕ С КАРТЫ»: АНАЛИЗ ДЕТСКИХ ПЛОЩАДОК И ИГР В КОНТЕКСТЕ ПОСТСОВЕТСКОГО ПРЕОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ЕКАТЕРИНБУРГА

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В настоящем исследовании детские игровые площадки становятся одним из факторов для изучения городских трансформаций, при этом предлагаемый анализ объясняет связь между указанными городскими преобразованиями и изменением дискурсов игры и детства. Работа посвящена в частности сравнению советских общественных детских площадок и постсоветских приватизированных игровых пространств Екатеринбурга. Методология исследования включает наблюдение и анализ полученных данных с применением концепции социального воспроизводства. Эти теоретические подходы, разработанные Синди Катц и Саскией Сассен, позволяют объяснить, каким образом локальные силы влияют на облик и развитие города. В результате анализа становится ясно, что глобальные факторы наряду с локальной трансформацией повлекли за собой изменения дискурса игры и детства: советский идеал коммунальных игровых пространств оставлен в прошлом, произошел переход к современным консьюмеристским местам игр. Если прежние советские детские площадки не подразумевали определенных целей игры, то частные площадки современного Екатеринбурга предлагают игровой нарратив досуга, любви и удобства для родителей. Дети становятся потребителями приватизированного игрового процесса, и в итоге большинство советских площадок в городе пустуют. В статье я доказываю, что сдвиг Екатеринбурга в сторону глобальной экономики и отход от советских идеалов способствуют поддержанию социальных отношений и воспроизводству социального неравенства среди детей, поскольку в таких условиях поощряются консьюмеристские игровые нарративы. Я предполагаю, что детские площадки Екатеринбурга служат отражением новых глобальных экосистем, социальная, политическая и экономическая трансформации которых дают толчок к формированию нового взгляда на социальную значимость детских игр и игровых пространств.

**Ключевые слова:** игра; детские площадки; дети; социальное воспроизводство; городская трансформация